
Kinga Pozniak, Nowa Huta. Generations of Change in a Model Socialist Town

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20 – Sur cette notion, voir l'ouvrage récent dirigé par Dina Fainsberg et Artemy Kalinovsky, *Reconsidering stagnation in the Brezhnev Era : Ideology and exchange*, Londres : Lexington books, 2016. Nous préparons actuellement une biographie de Brežnev pour le compte des éditions Perrin, à paraître fin 2018.

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Generations of Change in a Model Socialist Town

Pittsburgh : University of Pittsburgh Press, 2014, 227 p. + x

Communist leaders in East Central Europe sought to create socialism in part along the path set in the USSR under Stalin. To one degree or another, they centralized planning, pursued heavy industry, collectivized agriculture, purged untrustworthy officials and intellectuals, and rebuilt scientific, educational, and other institutions. They also rebuilt cities—and built cities anew. One such effort was the creation of mono-profile industrial centers devoted to iron and steel or petrochemicals—Eisenhüttenstadt, Germany, Sztalinvaros, Hungary, Dmitrovgrad, Bulgaria, and Nowa Huta, Poland. Leaders and planners established Nowa Huta, or New Steelworks, in 1949, to force the pace of development of an agricultural region near the Vistula River, “proletarianize” Krakow, the Polish city that had offered the greatest political resistance to the communists, and to demonstrate the glories of socialism.

One of the important functions of these new cities and industrial technologies was to transform peasants into new generation workers devoted to the regime. The state encouraged the loyalty of workers by providing such domestic infrastructure as stores, kindergartens and medical clinics, and new, well furnished apartments. Anthropologist Kinga Pozniak examines the impact of the political, social, and economic changes of the post-socialist world on the people and city of Nowa Huta since the collapse of socialism. Pozniak sets out to understand the memory politics of the city among three generations, elderly, middle-aged, and young. Acknowledging that memories, discourses, and agendas are produced and negotiated at multiple scales, she demonstrates the importance of locality in shaping histories and identity. Pozniak notes that at the nation level a hegemonic narrative of socialism as repressive regime incapable of meeting peoples true interests persists, and often those with positive views of the socialist past can be treated as “losers” for their nostalgia.

In five chapters, Pozniak indicates the importance of the past in shaping the present and future. In chapter 1 Pozniak examines the physical city itself—and reveals that many people enjoy the socialist city with the proximity of services and housing in each region, and the presence of significant green zones, rather

than decay and poor design often associated with socialist cities. The city was also site of resistance, for example, in the response of workers to efforts of the authorities to attack the church or to fight Solidarity, the independent Polish trade union founded in 1980 in Gdansk to represent workers' demands. By 2014 it was a site of inexpensive real estate with good urban planning and what Pozniak calls environmental revitalization, although she gives no evidence of the latter. Surely the steel works meet European pollution standards, but air and water pollution remain problems.

In chapter 2 Pozniak discusses work, memory and change in the Now Huta Steelworks, the largest employer with 40,000 workers, nearly three-quarters of whom were of peasant origin, at its peak in 1970s, or one-sixth of the city's population, but with many fewer today. Large factories were central to the organization of all life under socialism throughout Eastern Europe, not only work, but education, benefits, travel, entertainment, culture, health care, subsidized food and so on. These economic, cultural, and social benefits were crucial to engender regime legitimacy, even if the people rejected socialism's repressive one-party system and economic inefficiencies. Privatization and reorganization followed the collapse of socialism, leading to unemployment and to the disappearance of secure, relatively well-paying jobs, and career path for young people. Members of different generations view this change, the devaluating industrial work, the end of collectivism, and the one hand, and the modernization of equipment, better work conditions, and fewer accidents, on the other, that resulted, through different prisms of memory.

Chapters 3 takes the reader through museums and commemorations. Not surprisingly, Pozniak shows that narratives of Nowa Huta as a model socialist town and as a site of resistance to the socialist government are not incompatible, but reflect the diverse experiences of its residents and its rich history. She notes the difficulties of achieving balance between the experiences of local residents and the narratives that shape Poland's broader public sphere. Continuing in this vein, in chapter 4 Pozniak charts memories of socialism among city residents. She compares how older residents who built the city view socialism compared with their now middle-aged children who participated in Solidarity strikes both of whom lived a substantial portion of their lives here. Both drew on national and local narratives—reinforcing and challenging discourses on the past. They consider fundamental questions about the socialist experience: was Nowa Huta an opportunity? Was it a new life, a socialist paradise? A place where the poverty and squalor were overcome? A place that provided not only a new apartments, but a new world view? A place of work, and of extensive cultural activities and athletics and recreation? As Pozniak points out, Nowa Huta, like much of Poland in the 1980s, was a place of repression and resistance, with many workers joining Solidarity and opposing state-declared martial law in 1981. Many of the older generation worry about the disappearance of state-sponsored entertainment, recreational and cultural opportunities, and growing income disparity and declining social welfare. Others remember the repression of the past regime,

resistance against it, and the inefficient economy of shortages, and they welcome the freedom of mobility and speech they now have even if the socialism gave them stability and certainty.

In chapter 5 Pozniak treats memory and identity among the younger generation—people with few memories or experiences of the socialist period, although individuals whose memories of the past can be shaped by those memories passed along to them, family history, through schooling, and so on.

Dr. Pozniak provides a wealth of detail based on her extensive interviews in Nowa Huta over a one year period in 2009-2010, and provides a visual tour through her own photographs. In an engaging style she retells and analyzes a number of the interviews. She examines how people relate to state projects and ideologies, and how people reproduced socialist ideology and made it concrete in their daily lives. Her analysis shows that in spite of contemporary criticism, many people did widely accept certain aspects of the past.

This study would be stronger were Pozniak to provide greater historical grounding and context, especially so that the reader might fully comprehend the Nowa Huta of the 1970s and 1980s and its relationship to other industrial towns under socialism, and to explain in what ways, if any, Nowa Huta, differs from those other mono-industrial cities across the socialist world. Nowa Huta became a center of anti-socialist activism, which Pozniak might have explained in greater detail; she mentions Solidarity many times, but does not give a succinct description of its rise, activities, and how the authorities responded to it. She uses very few sources from the socialist period and virtually none of them are primary sources. At times her style is passive and rambling, in other places repetitive, and in still other places redundant (the second line of the book: ‘The two were seen as mutually exclusive and fundamentally incompatible with one another and thus divided the world into two opposing camps’ [p. 1].” But *Nowa Huta* remains a source of important information about the impact of the new capitalist world on the lives, expectations, and attitudes of city residents about the recent socialist past.

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Karen PETRONE, eds.*

**Everyday Life in Russia
Past and Present**

Bloomington – Indianapolis : Indiana University Press, 2015, 448 p.

This bulky, eclectic volume originated from conversations among its editors (who had collaborated before) that resulted in an interdisciplinary workshop at Indiana University in 2010, “Everyday Life in Russia and the Soviet Union.” The purpose